

## Adultery in post-war England

Article (Accepted Version)

Langhamer, Claire (2006) Adultery in post-war England. *History Workshop Journal*, 62 (1). pp. 86-115. ISSN 1363-3554

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/23744/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

### **Copyright and reuse:**

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

## **ADULTERY IN POSTWAR ENGLAND\***

**Claire Langhamer, University of Sussex**

***History Workshop Journal, Autumn 2006***

Alec: 'We know we really love each other, that's all that really matters'

Laura: 'It isn't all that matters - other things matter - self respect and decency. I can't go on any longer.'

(*Brief Encounter*, Dir David Lean, 1945)

*Brief Encounter* is generally accepted to be one of the classic postwar British films and is the story of a doomed, and ultimately unconsummated, extra-marital love affair between Laura Jesson (Celia Johnson) a middle-class housewife with children, and local married doctor, Alex Harvey (Trevor Howard). The dominant tone is one of emotional and sexual restraint: duty wins out over passion, decent behaviour triumphs over sexual fulfilment. Ultimately the characters adhere to models of behaviour founded upon denial and self-sacrifice with Alex conveniently removing himself and his family to South Africa to curtail the relationship. In this final rejection of the extra-marital affair, the moral ideal of marital fidelity is reinforced. In its treatment of desire the film is therefore often characterised as *the* archetypal representation of sexually repressed middle-class Englishness, even if it also 'epitomises a kind of yearning, a moment when women were desirous of greater freedoms.'<sup>1</sup> Yet within 1940s England, the lived experiences of a significant proportion of the public provided alternative models of marital behaviour. When Mass-Observation surveyed

sexual behaviour in 1949 it found that one husband in every four and one wife in every five admitted to extra-marital sexual relations.<sup>2</sup> Even the film's male star, Trevor Howard, asked director David Lean, 'why doesn't he fuck her? All this talk about the wood being damp and that sort of stuff.'<sup>3</sup> Certainly *Brief Encounter* provoked mixed audience responses at the time of its release. It appeared regularly on the film 'crying lists' of middle-class Mass-Observation panel members<sup>4</sup>, yet it also provoked laughter at a preview to a working-class audience in Rochester.<sup>5</sup> By the late 1960s the protagonists' behaviour elicited an even more raucous audience response, as the film historian Jeffrey Richards recalls: 'I remember attending a showing of the film in Cambridge in 1967 when the student audience were convulsed with laughter throughout, incredulous that the lovers did not just leap into bed together and to hell with the consequences, responsibilities and beliefs. This was a measure of how far value systems had changed since the 1940s.'<sup>6</sup>

This article suggests that such unproblematically linear models of sexual and emotional change across the postwar period are challenged by a closer examination of the social meanings and experiences of everyday marital infidelity. Recent histories of twentieth century hetero-sexual practices have tended to place the practices of young people centre stage within accounts of social change. For example, Hera Cook has argued forcefully that a 1960s sexual revolution founded upon the availability of the contraceptive pill was driven by the agency of young middle-class women determined to control their own fertility and break the link between sex and reproduction.<sup>7</sup> Within such approaches, levels of pre-marital intercourse are often read as evidence of changing sexual mores and yet the varied experiences of married people, beyond the realm of fertility, are less often interrogated. Indeed the postwar context of rising rates of marriage at ever younger ages has led this period to be characterised, in

demographic terms at least, as a golden age of marriage: ‘the only age, of the near universal, stable, long-lasting marriage, often considered the normality from which we have since departed’ as Pat Thane has put it.<sup>8</sup> Certainly an understanding of the postwar years as a time of ‘tense domesticity and anxious conformity’<sup>9</sup> persists, despite revisionist accounts which increasingly emphasise the sexual ‘instability’ of this period.<sup>10</sup>

This article is an attempt to refocus some of our historical attention towards illegitimate sexual and emotional intimacies involving married rather than single heterosexuals.<sup>11</sup> It attempts to de-couple extra-marital sex from pre-marital sex, a coupling so ingrained within both contemporaneous accounts and historical studies that it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the history of the two.<sup>12</sup> In fact, as Richards and Elliott have argued, whilst postwar attitudes towards pre-marital sex softened as the practice became more widespread, attitudes towards extra-marital sex grew increasingly negative even as it became apparently more common.<sup>13</sup> To place these two sexual practices within the same analytical trajectory is therefore misleading: the history of the former does not mirror that of the latter. Rather than locating the history of infidelity within the wider history of sex *per se*, this article suggests that it is the discursive construction of marriage within the postwar period which provides the most significant explanation for shifting attitudes towards and experiences of adultery. In particular it considers newly emergent tensions between mutuality and individualism and love and sex within the marital and extra-marital context, exploring the complex relationship between attitudes and behaviour which these tensions fuelled. The article will suggest that the immediate postwar years were indeed years of instability as new models of marital intimacy and sexuality, within a shifting material context, bred higher expectations but also greater potential

disappointments. By examining the underbelly of postwar marriage it is possible to trace the emergent cleavages which would ultimately undermine the practice of marrying for life, though not English *ideals* of marital commitment and fidelity.

Writing of the early modern period, David M. Turner has observed that, ‘studies of the gendered nature of adultery have overwhelmingly concentrated on the consequences of illicit sexuality rather than its causes. We still know relatively little about why people embarked on extra-marital affairs or the emotions and practical dilemmas they raised.’<sup>14</sup> Certainly there is little historical writing on this topic within the historiography of twentieth-century England. The major scholarly work remains Annette Lawson’s sociological study which uses a combination of questionnaires and interviews to explore the nature of contemporary adultery.<sup>15</sup> More recent historical work which illuminates the twentieth-century picture includes Joanna Klein’s work on ‘irregular marriages’, which uses police personnel records to explore affairs, separations and cohabitation amongst the English working-classes across the period 1900-1939.<sup>16</sup> Klein illuminates the strategies by which individuals confounded legal definitions of marriage, in a period where divorce remained the province of the wealthy and separation agreements precluded re-marriage. She concludes that men and women, ‘escaped unhappy marriages in ways not generally associated with respectable society.’<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, Richards and Elliott have used a study of *Woman’s Own* problem pages to explore shifts in the advice offered to those involved in extra-marital relationships across the 1960s and 1970s arguing that, ‘as love becomes more central in marriage, marriage becomes more exclusive.’<sup>18</sup> On the whole however, extra-marital affairs are referred to in passing by histories more broadly concerned with marriage and divorce across the century.<sup>19</sup>

This article combines an analysis of shifting attitudes towards infidelity, examined through the use of social surveys, parliamentary papers and the print media, with a consideration of the emotional dilemmas and dramas which it engendered. Written life histories, solicited by the social investigative organisation, Mass-Observation, constitute one way of examining individual attitudes and experiences and this article draws on both 'old' and 'new' Mass-Observation material.<sup>20</sup> Particular use is made of the memory texts provided by correspondents to the 1998 directive, 'having an affair'. The on-going nature of Mass-Observation which has allowed it to develop relationships of trust often over a period of many years with its volunteer writers, provides particularly useful source material for the historical study of infidelity. Whilst the difficulties of accessing individual sexual histories through the life history method have long been acknowledged, the unique research relationships which this organisation has developed over the twenty-five years that the new project has operated encourages participants to offer their views and experiences of even the most emotionally sensitive life events in significant detail and sometimes in an overtly confessional manner. With this in mind the final part of the article focuses upon a limited number of individual narratives as 'telling cases' offering 'deep and intimate insights'.<sup>21</sup>

The first part of this article establishes a context for infidelity within the period through the consideration of discursive constructions of marriage. Here there is a particular focus upon the overarching tension between marriage as a relationship and marriage as an institution, although the relationship between mutuality/individualism and sex/love will also be addressed. This is followed by analysis of the key site for public discussion of adultery: the postwar divorce debate. This debate became crystallised around the Royal Commission on Marriage and

Divorce which sat between 1951 and 1955 at a time of increasing public pressure for divorce law reform. Here the article draws upon the Minutes of Evidence to the Commission, in addition to newspaper divorce reports, to illuminate the historically specific status of adultery within a period when divorce became more widely available than hitherto. This section also considers the strategies which individuals employed to circumvent the inadequacies of the divorce laws, notably through attention to the much discussed postwar 'illegal wife'. The final section of the article explores shifting attitudes towards adultery and the nature of everyday affairs within the historically specific context of the 'golden age of marriage'.

## **POSTWAR MARRIAGE**

When Marie Stopes published her ground breaking work *Married Love* in 1918, she hastened the cultural penetration of a model of English marriage which placed sexual and emotional intimacy centre stage for both men and women.<sup>22</sup> In the years that followed a whole series of marriage manuals emerged which drew upon and sought to popularise the ideas of sex theorists such as Havelock Ellis and Freud. These texts encouraged the eroticisation of marriage, emphasising in particular the female potential for sexual pleasure within matrimony.<sup>23</sup> Whilst studies by Roberts and Higgins amongst others have demonstrated how inconsistently the 'modern marriage' chimed with the lived experience of *working-class* couples in the interwar years, the period following the Second World War witnessed the deepening of a discursive construction of marriage which foregrounded love and sex.<sup>24</sup> The postwar ideal of 'companionate marriage', promoted vigorously by the marriage guidance movement

but evident across a range of sites from Royal Commission Reports to women's magazines, emphasised the relational aspects of matrimony as well as its status as an institution. Crucially it placed a particularly heavy emphasis upon emotional intimacy between married couples.<sup>25</sup> Good communication, a shared interest in home and family, and mutual sexual pleasure became central planks of the postwar marital ideal, although within this model gender roles remained clearly delineated. The male breadwinner model persisted despite a growth in the number of married women workers and a discourse of marital 'equality.'<sup>26</sup>

The postwar companionate marriage was founded upon a historically specific demographic and economic context. The twentieth century shift towards smaller families, combined with rising affluence and new housing stock, enabled interwar dreams of domestic privacy to be actualised in the postwar world.<sup>27</sup> Home-centred leisure and patterns of consumption, in addition to a particular emphasis upon the welfare of children, placed family life centre-stage both culturally and politically. Within this context husbands and wives were conceptualised as inhabiting emotionally exclusive mutual worlds: emotional investments outside of the central family relationship were increasingly questioned. Women's magazines and newspapers of the interwar years had not been afraid to suggest separate leisure for spouses. For example, the composer Ivor Novello instructed women *Manchester Evening News* readers in 1930 to, 'develop some hobbies of your own. Don't want to be always with him.'<sup>28</sup> In the postwar years the dominant advice was more along the lines offered by Robert E. Gibbs to the same readership in 1955: 'Guard your marriage from that dreadful monotony. Go on. Enjoy yourselves together.'<sup>29</sup> Privacy and togetherness permeated dominant representations of modern domesticity: 'family leisure' and home-based patterns of consumption came to typify its actualisation.



Of course neither modern domesticity, nor the companionate marriage which lay at its heart, won universal or uniform acceptance within this period.<sup>30</sup> The classic model of working-class conjugal separation so evident in interwar studies by Chinn and Roberts, persisted into these years: evident in surveys of London, Banbury and 'Ashton'.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, ostensibly more companionable working-class, as well as middle-class, marriages emerged from studies by Young and Willmott and Ferdinand Zweig and it seems reasonable to suggest that gender roles were in a state of transition as women and men confronted ways of living within a historically distinct family framework.<sup>32</sup> The dominant construction of marriage within the cold war era was, however, rather unstable founded upon tensions which were not, necessarily, reconcilable. A discourse of mutuality, outlined by Marcus Collins as dominant at mid-century<sup>33</sup>, came into conflict with a growing emphasis upon the individual and his or her self-actualisation.<sup>34</sup> As Roberts has argued of this period, there was a 'constant tension between the growing emphasis upon individual right, on the one hand, and on the other, the demand for some degree of self sacrifice which marriages make.'<sup>35</sup> A re-formulated marriage relationship which placed love and sex at its centre bred tensions, contradictions and ultimately discontent. As a number of commentators have argued, romantic love, held by postwar marriage reformers to be the 'moral cement of personal relationships',<sup>36</sup> provided an unstable basis upon which to build actual marriages.<sup>37</sup> Where love itself tied partners to each other, what, other than the divorce laws, would keep them tied in the absence of love? If pleasurable sexual intercourse facilitated through the use of contraception was to become both a marital right and 'a form of emotional communication',<sup>38</sup> as those involved in the National Marriage Guidance Council believed it should, then how might it be contained within marriage if satisfaction was not forthcoming there? The power of sex to undermine as

well as strengthen marriage permeated contemporaneous accounts of married life as Jane Lewis has so comprehensively demonstrated.<sup>39</sup>

Certainly the constituent parts of the postwar construction of marriage permeated actual marriages unevenly. As the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce began to sit in 1951, the anthropologist, Geoffrey Gorer, conducted a survey of English society and attitudes based upon detailed questionnaire responses received from over 10,000 readers of the *People* newspaper. Gorer found that English men most valued appropriate feminine skills in their wives, rating good housekeeping more important than love. Within this study, English women most valued an agreeable character and understanding in their husbands.<sup>40</sup> Sexual compatibility was ranked only ninth in the list of factors making for a happy marriage although *incompatibility* was ranked fifth in the factors which might wreck a marriage.<sup>41</sup> Gorer concluded that ‘it is marriage which is important, not, I think, love or sexual gratification; and marriage is living together, making a home together, making a life together and raising children.’<sup>42</sup> By the time of his second major survey, *Sex and Marriage in England Today* conducted in 1969, however, the same author detected significant change in attitudes towards the marital relationship, with a greater emphasis than previously upon comradeship, companionship and communication.<sup>43</sup> Love, affection and a satisfactory sex life had grown in importance. ‘This shift in emphasis to husbands and wives being people who like one another rather than as efficient executants of their roles as bread-winner and house-wife would appear to confirm the shift to the ideal of symmetrical marriage’, asserted Gorer.<sup>44</sup> Survey evidence suggests, then, that the period from the early 1950s until 1969 saw a significant shift in expectations of, and attitudes towards, marriage at a time when it was increasingly popular and entered into at increasingly younger ages.<sup>45</sup> Marriage in

the postwar era should therefore be viewed as an evolving institution *and* relationship, within which expectations of emotional and sexual exclusivity were steadily growing.

Nonetheless, across the period, the gap between aspiration and lived experience could be substantial and the stresses, both perceived and actual, placed upon the marriage relationship were considerable. The Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce was firmly of the opinion that, 'marriages today are at risk to a greater extent than formerly', suggesting that housing shortages, the postponement of children, early marriage, the changed position of women, the assertion of individual rights in addition to 'an undue emphasis on the over-riding importance of a satisfactory sex relationship', were contributory factors.<sup>46</sup> In her evidence to the Commission in 1952, Moya Woodside contended that:

Marriage and a home of one's own are still the desired and predominant goals. But expectations are higher: the more thoughtful young men and women today see marriage as a partnership and a sharing of aims and activities in every sphere of life. Their sex relationship is intended to be satisfying to both. They set an increased rating on the needs and welfare of children, and the small *planned* family is a general ideal. If they are disappointed, they are less willing to go on with a hopeless or even unsatisfactory mating than were their parents.<sup>47</sup>

Higher expectations brought the possibility of greater disappointment if the gap between expectation and reality grew too great or too volatile. Natalie Higgins observed of the men and women she interviewed for her study of married life across the central years of the twentieth century that: 'Those married in the 1950s had higher

expectations of marriage and were more likely to be dissatisfied than those married in the 1930s.’<sup>48</sup> Young women who enjoyed new employment opportunities, increased wages and rising social independence from the mid 1930s onwards actively rejected the domestic and maternal drudgery of their mother’s lives, bringing rising aspirations to the marriage contract.<sup>49</sup> A reformed marital relationship, planned motherhood and a home of one’s own were interwoven in the marital dreams of the postwar world.<sup>50</sup> And yet a growing emphasis upon the relational aspects of marriage could conflict with its institutional basis. While love was increasingly used to legitimise marriage at ever younger ages, many young couples actually began their married lives in other people’s homes due to a shortage of available housing. In their mid-1950s Bethnal Green study Young and Wilmott found that half of the couples they surveyed lived with parents immediately after marriage.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, a greater emphasis upon emotional companionship and sexual intimacy within marriage brought risks even within the relational context. As we will see it made marital infidelity more, rather than less, likely as well as increasingly capable of dealing a fatal blow to the marriage itself. As Martin Richards has thus suggested, ‘companionate marriage is in itself unstable and it contains the roots of its own destruction.’<sup>52</sup>

## **THE DIVORCE DEBATE**

The primary public framework for the discussion of adultery remained the legal realm of divorce: when marriages did go wrong there were opportunities to escape the legal institution that had previously been open only to wealthier married couples. The 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act had established a double standard in relation to access to

divorce. Men could sue on the grounds of a single act of adultery, wives must cite an offence in addition to adultery such as desertion or cruelty. This double standard was testament to a long standing view that adultery was far more serious when perpetrated by a wife than a husband because of her ability to bring a child into the family whose paternity was not guaranteed. It also, of course, spoke to a more general sexual double standard and it was not until 1923 that wives gained access to divorce on the same grounds as their husbands: that ground being adultery alone. The 1937 Matrimonial Causes Act did, however, extend the grounds for divorce to include cruelty, insanity and desertion. In proposing this legal change Mr A. P. Herbert argued that the existing legislation encouraged both adultery and perjury through the necessity of staging adultery to effect the desired divorce: one of the uses of adultery to which we will return shortly.

Until the Second World War access to divorce was restricted to those who could afford it and until the 1926 Judicial Proceedings (Regulation of Reports) Act, the reporting of the divorces of the rich provided such salacious tales of adultery that the state was called upon to legislate to protect public morality from such unedifying reading.<sup>53</sup> Whilst 'poor persons actions' could be heard in certain assize towns from 1920, Colin Gibson suggests that in this period 90,000 people sought but did not secure, a judicial divorce through the Poor Persons' Procedure.<sup>54</sup> In effect working-class access to divorce was severely circumscribed with recourse made instead to summary separation orders awarded by the magistrates courts but which precluded re-marriage. This lack of access to legal remedy encouraged the kind of creative responses to marital unhappiness that Klein has outlined for the first half of the century, chief amongst them recourse to long term adulterous relationships.<sup>55</sup> It was, in fact, the pressure of war which paved the way for the expansion of access to

divorce. In the interests of morale, assistance was given to men in the armed forces who sought divorce on the grounds of adultery. Wives received no such assistance. When the war ended, 1946 became a peak year for divorce petitions (41,704) with two thirds of these initiated by husbands; a finding which, according to Stone 'suggests that the prime cause was wartime wifely infidelity.'<sup>56</sup> The wider provision of Legal Aid after 1949 opened up the divorce courts to those who had been barred hitherto on financial grounds.

The divorce system which operated between 1937 and 1969, the date when the principal of 'irretrievable breakdown' finally triumphed, was founded upon the notion of matrimonial offence. In order to effect legal dissolution of a marriage one party (the petitioner) must be found to be legally 'innocent' and one party legally 'guilty'. In the majority of cases the 'crime' upon which this distinction rested was adultery; either because it was the commonest cause of marital break-up or because it was perceived to be the easiest ground to prove or to fabricate. The court could exercise discretion to allow divorce if a petitioner had also committed adultery, however collusion, connivance or condonement acted as bars to divorce and the King's/Queen's Proctor was charged with investigating individual cases if the court raised suspicions in any of these regards. Men, but not women, could claim damages against the co-respondent as 'compensation for the loss of his wife and for the injury to his feelings and the hurt to his family life.'<sup>57</sup> Whilst damages continued to be awarded across this period, for example, in April 1964 Mr Edward Taylor agreed to pay a total of £6250 in damages to his lover's husband and son,<sup>58</sup> as the postwar period progressed opposition to the law regarding this practice grew. The *Daily Telegraph* suggested in December 1968 that, 'a provision as undignified and

equivocal as that which places a price on a woman, as though she were a work of art or consumer durable, should go.’<sup>59</sup>

Increasing public pressure for divorce law reform is evident in surveys of the period. In 1949 Mass-Observation found that one in three of those they interviewed in the street favoured irretrievable breakdown as grounds for divorce.<sup>60</sup> In April 1951, sixty per cent of those polled by Gallup agreed that after seven years separation a couple should be able to get a divorce.<sup>61</sup> A year later, sixty-five per cent felt that if both parties wanted a divorce it should be automatically available and by January 1968 only seven per cent felt divorce should not be allowed.<sup>62</sup> These polls followed an attempt in 1950 by Mrs Eirene White to allow even a ‘guilty’ partner access to divorce after seven years separation. However, her Private Members Bill was met with government stonewalling and the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce dissipated the energies for reform at least in the short term.

By the 1950s there was within discussions of the Divorce Law, a perception that marriage as an institution, and as a series of individual relationships, was under pressure. The Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce, described by O. R. McGregor as ‘amongst the least distinguished Royal Commissions of the twentieth century’<sup>63</sup>, took as its primary goal, ‘the need to promote healthy and happy married life and to safeguard the interests and well-being of children.’<sup>64</sup> Informed by an assumption of increased ‘divorce-mindedness’ in the face of a growing number of divorce cases, the Commission identified ‘a tendency to take the duties and responsibilities of marriage less seriously than formerly.’<sup>65</sup> Its determination to strengthen marriage ‘for life’ led it ultimately to recommend no significant change to the existing divorce laws. Yet other evidence suggests that the Royal Commission overstated the degree of divorce-mindedness amongst the English public in the 1950s.

In a study based on a 1959 survey conducted by the Population Investigation Committee in collaboration with Gallup, Griselda Rowntree found that, 'even in the context of a growing awareness of the possibility of divorce, few of the informants, when engaged, seemed prepared to envisage that they might resort to it if their marriages did not work out well. At this stage people did not typically regard marriage 'as a temporary affair with no degree of permanency'.<sup>66</sup> Marriage may well have been under pressure, but those entering into it were doing so in increasing numbers and approached it, at least initially, with a continued commitment to the ideal of life long monogamy.

Nonetheless, in the face of restrictive divorce laws those inhabiting, or touched by, 'empty shell marriages' did find ways of circumventing the law and carving out acceptable lives with partners other than their spouses. At the centre of these strategies lay a figure who was increasingly the subject of public concern: the 'illegal 'wife''. An illegal wife changed her name by deed poll to cohabit with, as if the wife of, a man whom she could not legally marry. It was, according to government sources, a growing practice in the postwar world. For example, Mass-Observation diarist Olivia Cockett embarked upon an affair with a married man, Bill Hole, in the early 1930s. Attempts by him to divorce his wife were thwarted in October 1941 when a divorce court judge refused the petition on the grounds of suspected collusion. Nonetheless the couple lived together until his death in 1972, and upon moving from London to Dorset in the early 1960s she changed her name by deed poll becoming known as Mrs Hole until her own death.<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere, a respondent to the Mass-Observation sex survey of 1949 offered an account of his own experience in this regard. Married during the First World War, he separated from his wife in 1937 upon falling in love with another woman: 'From 1940 onwards till now this woman and I



have continuously lived together, she having taken my surname by deed poll. We have been extremely happy together.’<sup>68</sup>

According to the Lord Chancellor in June 1947 there was ‘no question’ that the practice of name changing was becoming ‘more and more frequent’: it was ‘undoubtedly becoming a common practice.’<sup>69</sup> Indeed, so exercised was the Church of England by this issue that its Moral Welfare Council prepared a report on the subject which Lambeth Palace forwarded to the Lord Chancellor in the hope of legislation.<sup>70</sup> Newspaper evidence cited in this report seemed to demonstrate conclusively that women were using the practice to better enable respectable cohabitation. For example a report in the *Daily Mail* was quoted whereby a, ‘Miss May Lewes... described at the Old Bailey yesterday how she had changed her name by deed poll from Shepherd to that of a man with whom she had been living, so that her relations and friends would not be suspicious.’<sup>71</sup> The Moral Welfare Council report gave two primary reasons for an apparent, though unquantified, increase in the practice. First it suggested that the public was increasingly aware of the ease by which name changes could be effected. For example a BBC Home Service broadcast entitled ‘changing your name’, had suggested that ‘to the couple who are not married it means avoiding the embarrassment of ration books made out in the same address but in different names’. Second, it was argued that a heightened sense of the ‘legality’ of the practice stemmed from the wartime award of servicemen’s allowances to unmarried women living as wives.<sup>72</sup> However, although described by both the Lord Chancellor and the Home Secretary as an ‘abuse’, with the Home Secretary expressing, ‘every sympathy for those deserted wives who have suffered what must be the humiliating experience of discovering that their married names have been usurped’, neither felt that special legislation on the matter would be forthcoming.<sup>73</sup> This was not, however, to be the

end of the 'illegal wife' issue. In January 1955, the London Housewives' Association embarked on a major letter writing campaign targeting every Member of Parliament, suggesting a pressing need for legislation with regard to the law on name changing.<sup>74</sup> The Association's chair, Mrs Gertrude Carrington Wood, argued that, 'the use of the form "Change of Name Deed", obtainable from the Solicitors' Law Stationary Society Limited, on payment of 1 / 2 ½ d. makes a farce of British standards of justice and encourages deception.' Moreover, she suggested:

The fact that a woman living with a man, who is not her husband, taking his name by deed poll, though his wife may be alive and her husband alive, is a threat not only to the moral structure of society but also, in many cases, to the well being of legitimate and illegitimate children, and a cruel embarrassment of injustice to a spouse whose rights and true position are overthrown by an imposter.

Once again however, the government ruled out 'any hope of legislation on so controversial a matter.'<sup>75</sup>

The debate concerning the so-called illegal wife is evidence of postwar anxiety concerning the security of marriage in the face of extra-marital encounters. The practice of name changing echoes the strategies employed by the policemen examined in Joanne Klein's work on working-class irregular marriages who 'lived as if married to new unofficial spouses.'<sup>76</sup> It certainly demonstrates that individual men and women were willing to deploy all the resources available to them in search of legitimization for established extra-marital relationships. The existence of illegal wives therefore suggests that the golden age of marriage cannot be taken at face value. The

involvement of the Housewives' Association in 1955, mirrors the opposition of other women's organisations such as the Married Woman's Association and the Mother's Union to the easing of access to divorce. The lack of financial security for divorced or separated women and a suspicion that easier divorce would encourage men to trade in their wives for younger spouses, made women's groups fearful for married women's long term interests in an era when women were defined by their relationship with their family. Nonetheless between 1950 and 1970 the proportion of divorces granted to men which cited their wifely adultery as grounds rose significantly.<sup>77</sup>

## **POSTWAR ADULTERY**

In the everyday practices of a significant proportion of the married population the principal of lifelong monogamy was broken, sometimes once, sometimes with regularity. Yet it has been suggested that attitudes towards infidelity grew increasingly less, rather than more, tolerant.<sup>78</sup> Whilst marriage remained defined as an institution first and foremost, its success could not be judged solely on the grounds of sexual fidelity: good housekeeping or breadwinning skills might be more highly prized.<sup>79</sup> Conceptualised as a relationship of emotional and sexual companionship, infidelity struck at its very heart.<sup>80</sup> Yet what did adultery actually mean? Within the courts, definitions were ostensibly fairly clear: sexual intercourse between the respondent and co-respondent had to be proven. However, there was often a disjuncture between legal definitions of adultery and everyday usages of the term as was evident in the judgement *Barnacle v Barnacle* of 1948. Here the petitioner apparently believed adultery to be sex between two unmarried persons that resulted in

conception.<sup>81</sup> In fact, this judgement established that a solicitor must not only ask a client whether they themselves were guilty of adultery but ensure that he/she understood what adultery actually was. In his evidence to the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce, Professor L. B. C. Gower stated that, 'cases have been known where the petitioner said she thought it was not adultery because the other party was an infant or because the intercourse took place in the daytime.'<sup>82</sup> Divorce court evidence offered other somewhat outlandish mis-definitions such as 'drinking with men in public' or the view that adultery was not possible if the woman was 'over 50'.<sup>83</sup>

If everyday definitions of adultery were not always transparent, the legal quest for genuine proof of adultery free from suspicion of collusion or connivance provides additional evidence of the problems inherent in an intercourse based definition. The legal imperative to deny divorce to those suspected of fabricating adulterous liaisons ensured that the burden of proof was high and not a little confusing, particularly in relation to the vexed question of 'inference'. For example, in October 1952, the Divisional Court found that a separated woman, Mrs Elsie Maud England, had not committed adultery with George Morecroft, also separated, despite an admittance that he had spent the night in her room and a declaration that they 'were in love with each other and hoped to get married if their existing marriages were dissolved.'<sup>84</sup> Whilst the justices believed the pair to have been indiscreet, they found that their spending the night together, even where there was evidence of strong attraction, should not lead to a presumption of adultery. Mrs England's husband therefore failed in his attempts to discharge a maintenance order made against him. Eleven years later, a denial of adultery by Mrs Marjorie Gould of Canterbury appealing against the revoking of a maintenance order failed on the grounds that 'she was living in a house alone with

another man and went under his surname, which, without any explanation, told for her guilt.’<sup>85</sup> In this instance adultery was inferred; her status as an ‘illegal wife’ being particularly significant to the court. It is noteworthy, however, that despite these known circumstances she felt sufficiently sure of her position to enter into an appeal. The judiciary was certainly not necessarily willing to infer adultery from what was widely known as ‘hotel-bill’ evidence. In June 1953, for example, Mr Justice Karminski stated that, ‘I am not always prepared to make a finding of adultery after an hotel bill has been sent and a waiter called to say that two people were in a bedroom together.’<sup>86</sup> However, given the extent to which allegations of adultery were interrogated within the legal realm, divorce court actors sometimes employed a range of complex and duplicitous strategies in pursuit of legal divorce. Whilst Justice Karminski was not prepared to accept hotel bill evidence alone, a divorce was awarded in this case when it transpired that the husband’s hotel ‘adultery’ was a cover for a long-standing association with a married woman.<sup>87</sup>

Were extra-marital affairs really on the increase in the years after the Second World War? Certainly by the end of our period, Geoffrey Gorer felt it necessary to distinguish between ‘casual’ adultery and ‘serious’ adultery in his study of sex and marriage, dedicating discrete chapters to each topic.<sup>88</sup> Within his earlier study, adultery had been considered within a chapter on experiences of marriage.<sup>89</sup> In her oral history of working-class women and families across the period 1940-1970, Elizabeth Roberts observes that, ‘while premarital sex was described by respondents as happening throughout the century...adultery, when committed by women is only mentioned in the period after 1940’, suggesting that ‘it is likely that...sexual morality was changed to some degree by war-time circumstances.’<sup>90</sup> In his history of divorce, Lawrence Stone cites the increased use of wifely adultery as grounds for divorce by

husbands across the period 1950-1970 as evidence of ‘a breakdown of the ancient public moral stigma upon extra-marital affairs by wives.’<sup>91</sup> As we shall see shortly, where adultery remained the quickest way to obtain a divorce, the use of these figures to chart incidences of actual adultery is at least problematic. Given the nature of the activity under consideration, it is difficult to find evidence to prove that adultery was or was not on the increase in the postwar period; it is just as difficult to identify distinctions rooted in social class. What can be suggested, however, is that there was a very real public perception that extra-marital affairs were more common across social categories than had previously been the case. For example, in 1954 *The Times* reported that Lord Denning ‘feared that we had unfortunately reached a position where adultery, or infidelity or misconduct, as soft-spoken folk called it, was considered to be a matter of little moment.’<sup>92</sup> Five years later, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Fisher, speaking of a ‘tide of adultery’ asked whether it had ‘become such a public menace that the time has come when it ought to be made a criminal offence?’ adding that ‘the immense damage that adultery does to the public welfare in broken homes, and to the children of broken marriages, does constitute a very grave social danger.’<sup>93</sup> In 1949, Mass-Observation had found that clergymen tended towards the belief that adultery ‘should be punishable by law.’<sup>94</sup>

The complex and problematic status of adultery within the English divorce system until the Divorce Reform Act of 1969, certainly added to public anxiety concerning this facet of sexual behaviour. The need to prove an adulterous relationship within the divorce courts, had led to the emergence of a sub-culture around the detection, and if necessary fabrication, of adulterous liaisons. In the minds of many of those who testified to the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce, this sub-culture and the multi-layered deceptions which the divorce laws encouraged but

explicitly outlawed, brought both marriage and the law into disrepute. In fact, public disdain for the status of adultery within the courts was widely evident in the period even before the Second World War. Mr A.P. Herbert, who proposed the reform legislation of 1937, argued that ‘divorce by consent’ was having the effect that, ‘we are rapidly reaching a situation in which no stigma whatever will attach to a public confession of adultery.’<sup>95</sup> Herbert had earlier sought to bolster the case for extension of divorce grounds beyond adultery through his satirical novel, *Holy Deadlock*. ‘If you violently knock your wife about every night the ordinary person will conclude that you have not much affection for her’ his fictional solicitor observed, ‘but the law requires you to prove it by sleeping with another woman.’<sup>96</sup> *Holy Deadlock* constituted a sustained plea for reform of a divorce law which privileged adultery as *the* marital offence and by so-doing actively encouraged the performance of adultery as a means to an end. Outlining what was commonly termed a ‘Brighton quickie’, Herbert’s fictitious solicitor, Mr Boom, suggested to his client how the required ‘adultery’ might be effected following the engagement of a professional ‘well trained expert’:

As a rule, the gentleman takes the lady to a hotel - Brighton or some such place – enters her in the book as his wife – shares a room with her, and sends the bill to his wife. The wife’s agents cause inquiries to be made, and eventually they find the chambermaid who brought the guilty couple their morning tea. A single night used to be sufficient, but the President has been tightening things up, and we generally advise a good long week-end to-day.<sup>97</sup>

Although the Act of 1937 extended the grounds for divorce to include desertion and cruelty, the majority of divorces continued to be predicated upon the adulterous behaviour of one spouse: forty eight per cent in 1950, fifty six per cent in 1960 and seventy per cent in 1970.<sup>98</sup> The Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce heard substantial evidence that divorce ‘by consent’, that is by fabrication, continued to thrive in the postwar years. In a memorandum submitted to the Commission, L. C. B Gower, Professor of Commercial Law in the University of London, claimed to have heard of:

...one case in which the husband sent his wife hotel bills on two occasions but each time her enquiries failed to obtain evidence from the hotel staff. On the third occasion he invited a family friend to call upon him at the hotel, the friend entered the room at the appointed time and by a happy chance found the husband in bed with the other lady. A divorce was granted to the wife on the friend’s evidence.<sup>99</sup>

Gower speculated that amongst upper income groups over half of those cases which went undefended had bogus grounds at their centre, although he admitted that this was less likely to be the case amongst those proceeding under Legal Aid.<sup>100</sup> Evidence submitted by the Marriage Law Reform Society actually suggested that the majority of divorces were ‘by consent’, leading the society to argue that, ‘as a result of this law of collusion, the atmosphere of the divorce court has become charged with subterfuge and deceit.’<sup>101</sup>

The characters involved in the detection of real, or performed, adultery were stock figures by this period. The chamber-maid, for example, was a classic witness, so



well ingrained in the popular imagination that according to Gower one husband found naked in the wardrobe of his lover's bedroom exclaimed to his wife: "'You can't do anything: there's no chamber-maid'".<sup>102</sup> Other key figures included the hotel manager, who often demanded a fee in return for cooperation and the private detective who gathered the necessary evidence of adultery upon which to build a case. Indeed the role of the enquiry agent was deemed so significant that two representatives from the Federation of British Detectives, Mr Sidney Bullock and Mr Jack Ballard, were examined by the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce on its thirtieth day.<sup>103</sup> The Federation of British Detectives had been established in 1949 as a reaction to criticism of, and proceedings against, private detectives operating on divorce cases. It numbered just 200 members and the witnesses admitted that some 2,000 agents were at that time operating unlicensed. Bullock and Ballard provided a robust defence of what they described as their 'calling', painting a picture of honest, experienced, professional enquirers who were not averse to working for free when the case merited it. When pressed, however, they admitted that unscrupulous enquiry agents were undoubtedly involved in arranging divorces and fabricating adultery for their clients.

Beyond the stock figures of chamber-maid, hotel manager and detective, there existed a layer of people playing walk-on parts in the detection of adultery within and outside of the courts. For example, a Mr Roberts, who married his wife whilst on army leave in 1947 received an anonymous note accusing his wife of 'associating with other men' on his return to his unit.<sup>104</sup> One Mass-Observation correspondent recalled that her father's wartime affair with a woman typist was ended when the family crafted and sent an official looking letter that only the woman's husband would open.<sup>105</sup> In July 1960 Mr Ligertwood, the District Registrar at Taunton, objected to his own walk-on role: a duty under the Registrars Directions of 2<sup>nd</sup>

October 1951 to report the proven adultery of a doctor to the General Medical Council.<sup>106</sup> 'It is utterly wrong' he argued 'that any officer of the Court should be expected to act as a type of special informer to any association of members of the public be they doctors, dentists or members of any other profession or calling.' When approached for his opinion, Sir George Coldstream, Permanent Secretary to the Lord Chancellor, admitted to having 'a good deal of sympathy with the stand which Ligertwood has taken', but nonetheless gave the advice that 'the professional bodies concerned are entitled to look to the responsible officers of the court for information on any finding of adultery.'<sup>107</sup> Adultery remained within this period an explicitly public concern.

The attitudes of the general public towards adultery were however more mixed. Klein's evidence from before the war suggests that within working-class society, community response towards individual acts of adultery was often dependent upon a perceived sense of justification.<sup>108</sup> Factors other than sexual fidelity were used to judge the success of a working-class marriage and these factors were deeply gendered. A poor housekeeping or breadwinning spouse might be seen to be a legitimizing factor in accounting for spousal betrayal.<sup>109</sup> The postwar years saw a gradual shift in attitudes towards adultery reflective of the changing nature of the marital relationship across social classes. Whilst John R. Gillis has suggested that sexual jealousy was rare in the 1940s and 1950s stating that, 'few took the romantic position that it was "morally wrong to keep bound to one partner who prefers another'<sup>110</sup>, Richards and Elliot have argued that 'there is some evidence to suggest that infidelity (particularly on the part of the husband) was more likely to be tolerated and seen as less of a threat to marriage in the 1950s and early 1960s than in the 1970s.'<sup>111</sup>

In 1949, Mass-Observation asked both its panel of correspondents and a street sample their opinions on the question, 'how do you feel about the idea of sex relations between people who are not married to one another?' The responses are, on the whole remarkable for their unwillingness to make judgements without an understanding of individual circumstance. For these correspondents, 'love' acted as a key justification for extra-marital sex, particularly amongst the young. For example a married assistant drainage officer aged twenty eight observed that: 'It's up to them. I don't think it matters whether one is married or not. The parties however should feel that they are in love. One should not regard the marriage license as a copulation certificate.'<sup>112</sup> Another married man, aged twenty nine observed, 'If people love each other and wish to copulate and for one reason or another are not married I see no reason why they should not. I disagree with copulation without love.'<sup>113</sup> Mass-Observation concluded that 'neither Panel nor street opinions of marriage often mention the need for complete sexual fidelity – although no doubt this is often implied. But even though extra-marital relations in the Panel group were less frequently admitted than sex relations before marriage, they are still acknowledged by one husband in every four and one wife in every five.'<sup>114</sup> Certainly the centrality of sexual fidelity to marriage relations in the immediate postwar years can be questioned. In 1951, Gorer found that infidelity was rarely perceived to be the worst 'crime' that a spouse could commit: only a minority of his sample believed that infidelity should automatically end a marriage.<sup>115</sup> Significantly Gorer noted 'the interesting correlation that those who consider sexual love 'very important' in marriage are much more likely to consider terminating the marriage if the spouse is discovered to be unfaithful than those who consider it 'fairly important'.'<sup>116</sup> Indeed, a number of those who submitted evidence to the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce, including the doctor Eustace

Chesser, claimed that the existing law was flawed precisely because it did allow a single act of adultery to be used as grounds for divorce.<sup>117</sup>

When asked by Gorer what a spouse should do on the discovery of adultery, both men and women across social classes placed discussion centre stage. Amongst the men of 1951, the second most popular strategy was self-examination, especially amongst the young. For example a twenty-five year old working-class man from Portsmouth suggested that a husband should 'try to find out where he has failed. To keep his wife content put that right and win her back', whilst a forty one year old middle class man from Barking concurred, 'be very considerate, at first look for own faults and try to help her. It may be a very difficult phase for her.'<sup>118</sup> Amongst women too, self examination was a popular solution, although this was differently framed in that there was a significant emphasis upon examining ones appearance. Gorer commented somewhat dismissively that: 'For some reason, which I confess to finding obscure, a permanent wave is considered particularly efficacious in bringing a straying husband back to the fold.'<sup>119</sup> Whilst this analysis over-simplifies a complex reaction, the importance of examining body and self does crop up repeatedly in the women's responses. For example, a thirty year-old woman from St Helens put it thus: 'First of all discuss it calmly with him, then do nothing but wait. Let the affair die a natural death and the man will return. In the meantime she can buy some new clothes and have her hair permed, make herself as attractive as she can. Spend more on herself than on the house.'<sup>120</sup> The contradictions inherent in a concept of companionate marriage which heaped domestic and emotional responsibilities upon women are evident in this fear that over-committing to the home might endanger the marital relationship.

The problem pages of the magazine *Woman's Own* offer another way of accessing attitudes towards adultery across this period, both in relation to the problems submitted and the advice offered. During wartime an unquestioning commitment to the preservation of marriage led women adulterers to be firmly castigated by the then agony aunt, Leonora Eyles. Single women involved with married men were described as 'shockingly dishonourable'<sup>121</sup>; married women should always give up their affair but never tell their husband unless pregnancy made disclosure unavoidable. Even a woman who feared she had contracted venereal disease through extra marital sex was advised, 'don't make your husband suffer too by telling him about your disloyalty. He can't know *unless* you tell him.'<sup>122</sup> Eyle's assertion that 'far more harm is done by morbid "honesty" than by sane concealment' typified her approach.<sup>123</sup> Women who wrote of their own husband's affairs received advice which sat firmly within the sexual double standard. Men's affairs were to be forgiven: they were generally to be viewed as frivolous, insubstantial and certainly should not be taken too seriously. The discovery of an affair was definitely not sufficient grounds to break a marriage: indeed men's affairs were entirely explicable within the context of war. In 1944 Eyles referred to 'this unrest in marriage' as 'a sort of epidemic at the moment, but it will pass.'<sup>124</sup> Women themselves were urged towards self-examination: '...have you tried to find out if there was anything in you that caused him to be unfaithful? Forgive him – but be honest with yourself and see if you were at all to blame.'<sup>125</sup> Unfaithful husbands were only really likely to be criticised by Eyles when they reneged on some other aspect of the marital deal. For example, a woman whose husband failed to support her financially, in addition to committing adultery, was advised to talk to a solicitor: 'Such abysmal selfishness will not yield to persuasion; it will only change through force', she advised.<sup>126</sup> Overall

then, problem page responses of the 1940s suggest a construction of marriage as an institution to be defended at all costs. Relational aspects of marriage took a back seat to the extent where dishonesty was suggested as a legitimate strategy in defence of the marital unit.

Throughout the 1950s, letters about affairs were rarely absent from the *Woman's Own* problem page, by this time presided over by Mary Grant. Indeed affair related problems could account for nearly half of the letters in any given issue. The dilemmas of the single woman involved with a married man loomed large and these women were always instructed to give up the relationship, even where it had continued for twelve years.<sup>127</sup> A woman whose lover asked her to wait for his divorce was met with the stark response: 'He is talking nonsense about divorcing her. Stop seeing him.'<sup>128</sup> The adultery stories presented on just one problem page in August 1955 provide examples of: a woman in love with her brother-in-law and pregnant by him; a wife who wanted to adopt the child which her husband had fathered through an affair; a woman who suspected her brother-in-law of having an affair; a wife who suspected her husband and an eighteen year-old conducting an affair with a forty-five year old married man.<sup>129</sup> By the late 1950s secrecy as a strategy was superseded by the advice to talk to each other, but only in conjunction with the experts: the Marriage Guidance Council was regularly suggested as a forum for discussion. Nonetheless, the advice to stop affairs, forgive errant spouses and re-make the marriage was consistently given.

By the 1960s, however, as Richards and Elliott have also suggested, the advice offered to those exposing their stories of infidelity was beginning to shift, as were the nature of the stories presented. If 1950s problem pages saw a surfeit of single women in relationships with married men, by the 1960s the problems of women bearing

children not fathered by their husbands and of those conducting workplace liaisons came to dominate. Questions around the possibility of divorce as a solution to marital unhappiness were more common. Moreover the advice offered to those with erring spouses shifted significantly. A letter from a woman whose husband was having an affair received the response from Mary Grant that she should leave him if he would not stop the affair.<sup>130</sup> In 1960, this particular advice was not yet evidence of a wholesale shift away from forgiveness across the problem pages: wifely equanimity was prescribed to another letter writer with the words, ‘you have had a severe emotional shock, but don’t you think you are exaggerating the importance of your husband’s lapse? I am not making excuses for him, but you were away, he was lonely, and in such circumstances a man can easily give way to temptation.’<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, by the mid 1960s the discourse of forgiveness, as well as the tendency to minimise the effect of affairs on married life, was in decline. In July 1965, Mary Grant received a letter from a woman who married her first boyfriend at the age of eighteen, met another married man in 1957 and subsequently had a son by him. The affair had been discovered and they had agreed to part. The respondent confessed that: ‘We found we were miserable when not seeing each other and now meet secretly, but I can’t bear this any more. I would love another baby and a normal married life. We don’t want to hurt them but should we divorce our partners?’ Whilst the advice of earlier years would have been to curtail the affair whatever the personal cost, Mary Grant’s response here acknowledged the possibility that some marriages might indeed be unsalvageable: ‘Both his wife and your husband are being irrevocably hurt all the time, for neither of them has anything like a loving relationship or even half a marriage. They must be painfully lonely. So, for their sakes as well as yours, it seems cruel to go on as you are – putting off facing your real responsibilities. I advise a visit

to you nearest Marriage Guidance Counsellor so that you can be helped to decide what course would be best for everyone.’<sup>132</sup>

Significant attitudinal change is also evident in Geoffrey Gorer’s second social survey. Gorer found that his 1969 cohort put much greater emphasis upon infidelity and jealousy as factors making for marital failure than had his previous cohort.<sup>133</sup> This was particularly the case amongst husbands. Within Gorer’s study we see a shift in popular understandings of marital success with far greater emphasis upon shared interests as a pre-requisite for matrimonial happiness. A twenty-three year-old married woman identified the causes of adultery as follows: ‘Going out separately; if they go out separately they might meet somebody else.’<sup>134</sup> Compare this to interwar models of marital leisure where couples were encouraged to strengthen their relationship through recourse to separate leisure.<sup>135</sup> Within Gorer’s second study, sexual fidelity was much more central to ideas of married happiness; self-examination, with its implied willingness to blame the self, was no longer a popular strategy when confronted with adultery. Intriguingly, when Gorer mapped individual attitudes on to actual behaviour he found that, ‘frequently there was little consistency between their views and their admissions.’<sup>136</sup> His amplification of this assertion certainly supports the contention that a hardening of attitudes towards infidelity accompanied increasing incidences of it:

The majority of those who admitted to their own extra-marital affairs were insistent on the importance of fidelity for the preservation of marriage and in many cases were very rigid in their views of how infidelity should be regarded; I only noted one informant who seemed conscious of the contradictions implicit in his different replies. This was a 28-year-old garage



owner who had had two partners before marriage and one after; he replied to the question: 'Now that the pill provides absolute safety, do you think faithfulness is or is not as important as ever in marriage?' by saying: 'Yes - but I must seem like a hypocrite after my earlier answers!'<sup>137</sup>

The years following the Second World War witnessed rising expectations of marriage and of the role of sex within it. Increased use of more effective contraceptive methods within marriage and the emergence of the contraceptive pill in 1961 allowed married women to exercise a hitherto unknown degree of control over their reproductive capacities, although as we have seen this did not prevent the conception of extra-marital children. Whilst the married woman, unlike her single sister was constructed as a legitimately sexual individual, fears that her sexuality might not be containable within marriage coincided with her increasing participation in paid employment and with it a movement beyond her immediate domestic sphere. How then did this social and cultural context impact upon individual experiences of adultery? The final section of this article uses a limited number of life history texts to explore such experiences on a 'telling case' basis, paying particular attention to gender differences within this sphere. As outlined above, Mass-Observation offers a particularly illuminating cache of recollections on this subject because of the unique relationship between the organisation and those who write for it. Nonetheless, correspondents still expressed caution in their writings on this subject and a number suggested that this was a topic which was 'too painful' to write on. One woman stated that: 'You will appreciate that I have been extremely 'cagey' and uncharacteristically discreet, partly because I do not like dwelling on this disreputable part of my life and

partly because I do not want to leave any clues. Though I doubt if my private life will be of much interest.’<sup>138</sup>

Of the 129 women who responded to the ‘having an affair’ Mass-Observation directive and whose experiences spanned the period up to 1969, twenty-seven had indeed had affairs and twenty-four had husbands who had committed adultery. Very few of these women had not been touched by affairs, either their own or those of relatives or friends. The impact on children was the most commonly used reason against affairs, followed by damage to the marital partner and to the relationship itself. Of the fifty-four male respondents whose recollections fit within this period, eight had had affairs and forty-six had not. Of the latter group, two said that their wives had committed adultery, and in both cases divorce had ensued. A number of the male correspondents made specific and repeated claims to marital fidelity. Those men who had had affairs tended to have had a number and employed a flexible construction of ‘love’ within their narratives which allowed them to love both wife and lover simultaneously. Across both sets of responses the Second World War and the advent of the contraceptive pill allied to a notion of ‘sexual revolution’ were assumed to be key drivers of change in marital sexual behaviour.

The significance of the 1950s/1960s context as an explanatory framework for adulterous episodes emerges as a significant theme within these texts: it is a theme which emerges more strongly within the women’s responses, although one of the men (a repeat adulterer) observed that ‘by about 1965 I saw that the tide of morality had changed and was ebbing fast...Adultery, I heard, was going on all around me, I felt I was missing out.’<sup>139</sup> Amongst the women, a retired librarian born in 1925 wrote that: ‘I heard on the radio that 80% of people commit adultery. When I first did, I wrote to close friends crowing about it, and they wrote back saying that they too were having

affairs. It was the golden September of 1959? 1960? Coming home after weekends, by train, everyone seemed to be wearing a Mona Lisa smile, was it the seven-year itch?’<sup>140</sup> A retired social worker born in 1931, offered her own story:

I grew up in the 1930s in a small W. Dorset town. I married at 21 in the 1950s. I would never have foreseen, then, that I would be involved in a significant number of extra-marital affairs, or that they would prove part of the life experience of most (not all) of my family and friends. Such relationships were still spoken about in a whisper, behind closed door, shocking. We didn’t even know what adultery meant till we reached our teens. Yet my own family was quite considerably rattled by a quasi-affair of my fathers: muttered about, hinted about, never pronounced openly.<sup>141</sup>

This woman had an affair in the early 1960s, and it is the historical specificity of the context which is particularly significant: ‘The downside was my fear of losing my children if the affair came to light and my husband wanted a divorce. In the 1960’s the legend of the ‘guilty party’ prevailed; courts still believed in removing children from the guilty, and therefore corrupting, parent.’ As Carol Smart demonstrates in her discussion of what might have happened to Laura Jesson had she perused her *Brief Encounter* and ended up in the divorce courts, the loss of children and home was a very real threat to the wife found guilty of adultery within this period.<sup>142</sup>

The second major theme within the Mass-Observation life histories concerns the tension between duty/guilt and self actualisation/desire; a tension which reflects the conflicts at the heart of the companionate marriage as it developed within this period. Whilst men, as well as women, framed their narratives around feelings of guilt

and regret, this was a much stronger theme within the stories of the latter. Vanessa May's study of Finnish women's divorce narratives in this period found that family obligation and an ethic of care militated against these women's pursuit of 'pure relationships' of the type outlined by Anthony Giddens.<sup>143</sup> The impact of an ethic of care upon those female Mass-Observers who experienced affairs could be profound and long-lasting. For example, a woman born in 1929 described the directive topic as 'a difficult subject as I still feel guilty about my affair which led to my leaving husband and home. I now think sometimes it was a mistake.'<sup>144</sup> Another, born in 1936, described her own 'sheer, selfish, stupid behaviour' in conducting an affair with a work colleague, explaining that: 'I find this directive hard to write about. To admit to, even though it was in the 60s. I still feel ashamed. Ashamed of the way I hurt my husband, a kind and trusting man who didn't deserve all the shock, pain, humiliation I introduced him to.'<sup>145</sup> Male correspondents were less likely to dwell upon guilt in constructing their stories of infidelity; if an organising concept for their narrative was evident then it tended to be that of duty. Amongst this sample at least, a husband's infidelity appears to have been less likely to precipitate divorce than that of a wife, allowing the husband to make claims to family duty whilst outlining recurrent adulterous practices. One male respondent offered a particularly detailed account of his extra-marital affairs; an account within which duty and self actualisation vie for attention, but are ultimately reconciled.<sup>146</sup> The narrator was born in 1933 and married in 1957. He remained faithful to his wife for the first few years of marriage but subsequently embarked upon a series of extra-marital affairs. The second affair takes centre stage within his narrative as he recalls that:

We both fell, plunged, crashingly in love. I have never known anything like it. We became obsessed with each other. Our sexual activity stimulated us both as never before. And conversation – just being together was the greatest joy on earth. Each of us found that the other's adoration uplifted our self-esteem. This in my case stimulated me into increased activity at work, and I now gained even further promotion and riches (and even a modest fame – as my name and photo were sometimes now in the business pages of the newspapers). This was in 1968.<sup>147</sup>

However, the affair quickly became bitter-sweet with the sadness of separation but he, at least, would not countenance divorce because they both had children. The affair was duly discovered by the respective partners and eventually it ended. 'What do I think when I look back on this? It brought me intense happiness but also prolonged unhappiness – more of the latter. Yet when all is said and done, I would not have missed this great experience of life. My life would not have been complete had I never loved so passionately.' Here we see an assertion of self-actualisation through love via adultery. Things did not work out so well for his lover, M, however:

The greatest pain suffered in this affair fell upon M. She wanted to marry me, but could not and felt rejected and unloved. And whereas I had a demanding job in which to submerge my sorrow, she did not. For a while there seemed to be the risk that she might become an alcoholic, but – being a very strong-minded woman – she overcame that. She is today still married and seems happy. On those few occasions when we meet accidentally, I take her for a coffee or a drink; often have an hour or so of lively conversation, catching up

with each other's news, we then sit, very happily in silence, holding hands.

We can each read each other's thoughts.

Within this complex narrative we see a number of themes: the inequitable impact of adultery on those involved, the contested nature of family duty and, ultimately, the transformative potential of romantic love and sexual pleasure.

Amongst women correspondents romantic love was more likely to be constructed as irrational and destructive rather than transformative. For example, a woman married in the 1950s claimed that 'the sordid, and I use that word with sincerity, details were conducted in, to me at least, a romantic glow, without a thought to reality. To indulge oneself seemed the norm. Three of my nearest cousins were divorcing. Going off to 'greener pastures.'<sup>148</sup> She suggested furthermore that, 'I don't know any answer to my generation's promiscuity, but I do see it as a sad reflection that we are all so susceptible to romance at the cost of all else.' Another woman who conducted an affair during the war whilst her husband was in the forces stated that: 'In excusing what I know to be sinful I have to say that he was an exceptionally attractive man and a very skilful seducer, against whom I put up a feeble resistance of pretending that I loved two men at once.'<sup>149</sup> In contrast a man born in 1916 described his first affair with a secretary at the evening institute where he was the deputy head<sup>150</sup>:

It started as a mere enjoyment of each other's body, but we soon found that we were in love. Fortunately this did not diminish our love for our respective marriage partners – the idea that one can love only one person at a time is one

of the myths propagated by god botherers to tighten their control of the minds of the credulous.

In explaining this, and other affairs over the course of his marriage, this man asserted that: 'I must reiterate that although I realise now what I did not always realise at the time, that I was in love with all three of these women, I remained in love with my wife and my marriage was enhanced by the affairs.' The apparently greater ability of those male Mass-Observers, who admitted their affairs, to reconcile their feelings of love for different women, combined with an apparently lesser commitment to honesty in marriage and a persistent sexual double standard in attitudes towards adultery seems to have ensured that its impact upon their marital relationships was consistently more 'limited' than was the case amongst women.

## **CONCLUSION**

Marital infidelity attained a new prominence within public discussions of sexual and emotional life in the postwar world. The conjunction of a series of factors including extended access to divorce, still premised upon the notion of matrimonial fault, a state-sponsored determination to re-make family life in a postwar context and an increasing emphasis upon the relational aspects of marriage provided a historically distinct context for attitudes towards, and practices of, adultery. Nonetheless, a continuing sexual double standard, combined with their precarious economic status ensured that female adulterers tended to pay a higher emotional, material and social

price for their transgression than men. Consideration of the meanings and significance of infidelity allows the historian to destabilise a 'golden age' characterisation of postwar marriage. Examination of the complex ways in which love, sex and fidelity were negotiated in public and private accounts encourages a more nuanced assessment of the sexual and marital history of this period. The account offered in this article does not fundamentally challenge readings of the postwar period which identify significant social-sexual change as a facet of the late 1960s: the evidence has demonstrated that attitudes towards adultery did shift in this period. However, it has been suggested that this shift was not a simple reflection of attitudes towards pre-marital sex and cannot be read as unproblematic evidence of increased permissiveness. Whilst a foregrounding of the importance of love and sex to marriage may well have contributed to a softening of attitudes towards pre-marital experimentation, that very same emphasis encouraged a hardening of attitudes towards extra-marital sex even as it became more common. Fundamentally, this article suggests that histories of the so-called 'sexual revolution' which place youth culture and the development of the contraceptive pill centre stage remain partial accounts. Whilst the behaviour of single people should not be underplayed in the re-making of English sexual life, the varied emotional and sexual practices of married life also contributed to the significant social change which followed the immediate postwar years.

---

\* I would like to thank Ben Jones for research assistance on this article and the School of Humanities at Sussex for research support. I would also like to thank Carol Dyhouse, Lucy Robinson and the referees



---

at *History Workshop Journal* for their most helpful comments. Extracts from the Mass-Observation Archive are reproduced with the permission of the Trustees of the Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex.

<sup>1</sup> Carol Smart, 'Good wives and moral lives: marriage and divorce 1937-51' in Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson eds. *Nationalising femininity. Culture, sexuality and British cinema in the Second World War*, Manchester, 1996. p. 91. In this essay Smart suggests that the *Brief Encounter* spoke to an increasing desire for sexual satisfaction amongst middle-class women of this period. p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> Liz Stanley, *Sex surveyed 1949-1994. From Mass-Observation's 'Little Kinsey' to the National Survey and the Hite reports*, London, 1995, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Brownlow, *David Lean*, London, 1996, p. 199.

<sup>4</sup> Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, 'Moved to tears: weeping in the cinema in postwar Britain', *Screen*, 37:2, Summer 1996, 152-173, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Brownlow, *David Lean*, p. 203.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British national identity. From Dickens to Dad's Army*, Manchester, 1997, p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> Hera Cook, 'The English Sexual Revolution: technology and social change', *History Workshop Journal*, 59, 2005, pp.109-128.

<sup>8</sup> Pat Thane, 'Family life and "normality" in post-war British culture', in Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann eds. *Life after death. Approaches to a cultural and social history of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s*, Cambridge, 2003, p. 198.

<sup>9</sup> Lynn Segal, *Straight sex. The politics of pleasure*, London, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Lesley Hall, *Sex, gender and social change in Britain since 1880*, Basingstoke, 2000, p. 166.

<sup>11</sup> This article is not concerned with the question of 'agreed' adultery and 'open marriages' although these clearly existed across the century.

<sup>12</sup> This is certainly the case in Mass-Observation's 'Little Kinsey' where the section on 'sex outside marriage' slips unhelpfully between pre-marital and extra-marital sex. Stanley, *Sex surveyed*, pp. 132-142.

<sup>13</sup> Martin P. M. Richards and B. Jane Elliott, 'Sex and marriage in the 1960s and 1970s', in David Clark ed. *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change. Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne (1944-88)*, London, 1991, p. 44. Warren Colman argues along the same lines that: 'It is a curious fact that while

---

attitudes towards pre-marital sex and divorce have become far more liberal over the past fifty years or so, attitudes towards extra-marital sex have, if anything, hardened.' Warren Colman, 'Fidelity as a moral achievement', in Christopher Clulow ed. *Rethinking Marriage. Public and private perspectives*, London, 1993, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> D. M. Turner, *Fashioning Adultery. Gender, sex and civility in England 1660-1740*, Cambridge, 2002, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Annette Lawson, *Adultery. An analysis of love and betrayal*, Oxford, 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Joanne Klein, 'Irregular marriages: unorthodox working-class domestic life in Liverpool, Birmingham, and Manchester, 1900-1939', *Journal of Family History*, 30:2, 2005, pp. 210-229.

<sup>17</sup> Klein, 'Irregular marriages', p. 213.

<sup>18</sup> Richards and Elliott, 'Sex and marriage', p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> See for example, Natalie Higgins, 'The changing expectations and realities of marriage in the English working class, 1920-1960', DPhil thesis, University of Cambridge, 2002 and Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and families. An oral history, 1940-1970*, Oxford, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> On the history of Mass-Observation see Nick Hubble, *Mass Observation and everyday life: culture, history, theory*, London, 2005; Tom Jeffrey, 'Mass-Observation, a short history', *Mass-Observation Archive Occasional Paper* 10, 1999 and Tony Kushner, *We Europeans? Mass-Observation, 'race', and British identity in twentieth-century Britain*, Aldershot, 2004. An introduction to Mass-Observation with a particular focus on the new project is provided by Dorothy Sheridan, David Bloome and Brian Street in *Writing ourselves. Mass-Observation and literacy practices*, Creskill, NJ, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> A. James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson, *Ten pound Poms. Australia's invisible migrants*, Manchester, 2005, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Marie Stopes, *Married Love*, London, 1918.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed analysis of the sex manuals published between 1918-1972 see Hera Cook, *The long sexual revolution. English women, sex, and contraception 1800-1975*, Oxford, 2004, pp. 341-354. On the reception of Stopes' ideas about female sexual pleasure see Ellen Holtzman, 'The pursuit of married love: women's attitudes toward sexuality and marriage in Great Britain, 1918-1939', *Journal of Social History*, 16:2, 1982, pp. 39-51.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A woman's place: an oral history of working-class women, 1890-1940*, Oxford, 1984, and *Women and families*; Higgins, 'The changing expectations and realities of marriage'.

- 
- <sup>25</sup> Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield, 'Social reconstruction and the emergence of companionate marriage, 1945-59', in Clark *Marriage, domestic life and social change*. These authors describe companionate marriage as 'the most distinctive feature of domestic life during this period', p. 7. On the marriage guidance movement and companionate marriage see Marcus Collins, *Modern love. An intimate history of men and women in twentieth-century Britain*, London, 2003. pp. 90-133.
- <sup>26</sup> The proportion of married women participating in the labour market increased from 10% in 1931 to 21.7% in 1951, 29.4% in 1961 and to 42% in 1971. Duncan Gallie, 'The labour force' in A. H. Halsey ed. *Twentieth-century British social trends*, London, 2000, p. 292.
- <sup>27</sup> Claire Langhamer, 'The meanings of home in postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 40:2, 2005, pp. 341-362.
- <sup>28</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, 3 April 1930, p. 3.
- <sup>29</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, 27 June 1955, p. 2.
- <sup>30</sup> Langhamer, 'The meanings of home', p. 361.
- <sup>31</sup> Roberts, *A woman's place*; Carl Chinn, *They worked all their lives: women of the urban poor in England, 1880-1939*, Manchester, 1984; Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Network*, London, 1957; Margaret Stacey, *Tradition and change: a study of Banbury*, Oxford, 1960; Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, *Coal is our life*, London, 1956.
- <sup>32</sup> Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and kinship in East London*, Harmondsworth, 1957; Peter Willmott and Michael Young, *Family and class in a London suburb*, London, 1960; Ferdinand Zweig, *The worker in affluent society. Family life and industry*, London, 1961.
- <sup>33</sup> Marcus Collins, *Modern love*.
- <sup>34</sup> See Anthony Giddens, *The transformation of intimacy. Sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*, London, 1992 and Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *The normal chaos of love*, London, 1995.
- <sup>35</sup> Roberts, *Women and families*, p. 114.
- <sup>36</sup> Jane Lewis, 'Public institution and private relationship. Marriage and marriage guidance, 1920-1968', *Twentieth Century British History*, 1:3, 1990, pp.233-263, p. 258.
- <sup>37</sup> See Denis De Rougemont, *Passion and society*, London, 1940 and Niklas Luhmann, *Love as passion. The codification of intimacy*, Stanford, 1986.
- <sup>38</sup> Higgins, 'The changing expectations and realities of marriage', p. 207.

- 
- <sup>39</sup> Lewis, 'Public institution and private relationship'.
- <sup>40</sup> Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character*, London, 1955, p. 125.
- <sup>41</sup> Gorer, *Exploring English Character*, p. 138.
- <sup>42</sup> Gorer, *Exploring English Character*, p. 161.
- <sup>43</sup> Geoffrey Gorer, *Sex and marriage in England today. A study of the views and experiences of the under-45s*, London, 1971, p. 65.
- <sup>44</sup> Gorer, *Sex and marriage*, p. 74.
- <sup>45</sup> In the period 1931 to 35 the first marriage rate per 1,000 single women aged over 15 was 57.3 and for men it was 62.6; by 1936 to 40 it was 73.3 and 78.7 respectively and by 1966 to 70 it was 94.2 for women and 82.1 for men. In 1981 to 85 it dropped to 59.9 for women and 48.1 for men. D. A. Coleman, 'Population and family' in Halsey, *Twentieth-century British social trends*, pp. 56-7. The mean age at first marriage for men dropped from 27.3 in 1931 to 24.6 in 1971 and for women it dropped from 25.4 in 1931 to 22.6 in 1971. Jane Lewis, *The end of marriage? Individualism and intimate relations*, Cheltenham, 2001, p. 30.
- <sup>46</sup> Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce (hereafter RCMD), *Report 1951-1955*, London, 1956, p. 9.
- <sup>47</sup> RCMD *Minutes of Evidence*, paper number 47, memorandum submitted by Mrs Moya Woodside, Monday 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1952, 437:17.
- <sup>48</sup> Higgins, 'The changing expectations and realities of marriage', p. 271.
- <sup>49</sup> On young women, work and aspiration in the period up to 1950 see Selina Todd, *Young women, work and family 1918-1950*, Oxford, 2005.
- <sup>50</sup> Judy Giles, *The parlour and the suburb. Domestic identities, class, femininity and modernity*, Oxford, 2004, p. 63.
- <sup>51</sup> Young and Wilmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, p.31.
- <sup>52</sup> Martin Richards, 'Learning from divorce', in Christopher Clulow ed. *Rethinking marriage. Public and private perspectives*, London, 1993, p. 30.
- <sup>53</sup> Gail Savage, 'Erotic stories and public decency: newspaper reporting of divorce proceedings in England', *The Historical Journal*, 41:2, 1998, pp. 511-528.
- <sup>54</sup> Colin S. Gibson, *Dissolving Wedlock*, London, 1994, p. 90.
- <sup>55</sup> Klein, 'Irregular marriages'.

- 
- <sup>56</sup> Lawrence Stone, *Road to divorce. England 1530-1987*, Oxford, 1990, p. 401.
- <sup>57</sup> RCMD, *Report*, p. 120.
- <sup>58</sup> *The Times*, 11 April, 1964, p. 6.
- <sup>59</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1968. National Archives (hereafter NA), BC 3/541, 'File concerning possible changes to the law on damages for adultery.'
- <sup>60</sup> Stanley, *Sex surveyed*, p. 127.
- <sup>61</sup> George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls. Great Britain 1937-1975. Volume One 1937-1964*, New York, 1976, p. 245.
- <sup>62</sup> George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls. Great Britain 1937-1975. Volume One 1937-1964*, New York, 1976, p. 267; George H. Gallup, *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls. Great Britain 1937-1975. Volume Two 1965-1975*, New York, 1976, p. 965.
- <sup>63</sup> O. R. McGregor, 'The Morton Commission. A social and historical commentary', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 7:3, 1956, pp. 171-193, p. 189.
- <sup>64</sup> RCMD, *Report*, p. 7.
- <sup>65</sup> RCMD, *Report*, pp.7-8.
- <sup>66</sup> Griselda Rowntree, 'Some aspects of marriage breakdown in Britain during the last thirty years', *Population Studies*, 18:2, 1964, pp. 147-163, p. 151.
- <sup>67</sup> Robert W. Malcolmson ed. *Love and war in London. A woman's diary 1939-1942*, Waterloo, 2005, p. 194.
- <sup>68</sup> Mass-Observation (hereafter M-O), Topic Collection 12, 'Sexual Behaviour 1939-50', box 12, survey A9/2. Questionnaire (Panel D94/3), 1949, 12/12/A-E, file A, panel index no. 767.
- <sup>69</sup> NA, LCO 2/5639, 'Deed poll', June 1947. Letter from the Lord Chancellor to A. S. Robertson, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1947.
- <sup>70</sup> NA, LCO 2/5639, 'Deed poll', June 1947. Letter from Lambeth Palace to Viscount Jowitt, Lord Chancellor, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1947 enclosing the Report of Church of England Moral Welfare Council for the upper House of Convocation entitled 'Illegal "wives"'.
- <sup>71</sup> NA, LCO 2/5639, 'Deed poll', June 1947. Letter from Lambeth Palace to Viscount Jowitt, p. 2.
- <sup>72</sup> NA, LCO 2/5639, 'Deed poll', June 1947. Letter from Lambeth Palace to Viscount Jowitt , pp. 2-3.
- <sup>73</sup> NA, LCO 2/5639, 'Deed poll', June 1947 Letter from the Home Secretary to the Lord Chancellor, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1948.

- 
- <sup>74</sup> NA, LCO 2/5639, 'Deed poll', Letter from the Housewives' Association for the Protection of Family Life to the Attorney-General, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1955.
- <sup>75</sup> NA, LCO 2/5639, 'Deed poll', Letter from S. H. E. Burley to Mrs Carrington Wood, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1955.
- <sup>76</sup> Klein, 'Irregular marriages', p. 213.
- <sup>77</sup> Stone, *Road to divorce*, p. 403.
- <sup>78</sup> Richards and Elliott, 'Sex and marriage', p. 44; Colman, 'Fidelity as a moral achievement', p. 71.
- <sup>79</sup> Higgins, 'The changing expectations and realities of marriage', p. 90.
- <sup>80</sup> In 1969, when the Labour MP Alec Jones presented the Divorce Law Reform Bill to parliament he asserted that, 'to so many people adultery strikes at the very heart of married life.' *The Times*, 30 Jan, 1969, p. 3.
- <sup>81</sup> Lawson, *Adultery*, p. 40.
- <sup>82</sup> RCMD, *Minutes of evidence*, days 1-19, first day, Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 1952, memorandum submitted by Professor L. C. B. Gower, M.B.E., L.L.M., 16:22.
- <sup>83</sup> Lawson, *Adultery*, p. 40.
- <sup>84</sup> *The Times*, 15 Oct. 1952, p. 11.
- <sup>85</sup> *The Times*, 16 Oct. 1963, p. 5.
- <sup>86</sup> *The Times*, 9 June, 1953, p. 2.
- <sup>87</sup> *The Times*, 9 June, 1953, p. 2.
- <sup>88</sup> Gorer, *Sex and Marriage*, chapters seven and eight.
- <sup>89</sup> Gorer, *Exploring English Character*, chapter ten.
- <sup>90</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 110.
- <sup>91</sup> Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p. 403. Stone demonstrates that between 1950 and 1970, 'the proportion of all divorces granted to men which were on the declared grounds of their wives' adultery rose from 48 per cent to 70 per cent.'
- <sup>92</sup> *The Times*, 3 May, 1954, p. 2.
- <sup>93</sup> *The Times*, 23 Dec. 1959, p. 8.
- <sup>94</sup> Stanley, *Sex surveyed*, p. 135.
- <sup>95</sup> Stone, *Road to divorce*, p. 398.
- <sup>96</sup> A. P. Herbert, *Holy deadlock*, London, 1934, p. 27.

- 
- <sup>97</sup> Herbert, *Holy deadlock*, p. 31.
- <sup>98</sup> Stone, *Road to divorce*, p. 440.
- <sup>99</sup> RCMD, *Minutes of evidence*, Memorandum submitted by Professor L. C. B. Gower, 17:23.
- <sup>100</sup> RCMD, *Minutes of evidence*, Memorandum submitted by Professor L. C. B. Gower, 15.
- <sup>101</sup> RCMD, *Minutes of evidence*, days 1-19, ninth day, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1952, paper no, 23 memorandum submitted by the Marriage Law Reform Society, 224:10.
- <sup>102</sup> RCMD, *Minutes of evidence*, Memorandum submitted by Professor L. C. B. Gower, 17:23.
- <sup>103</sup> RCMD, *Minutes of evidence*, days 20-41, thirtieth day, 18 Nov. 1952, 778: 7422.
- <sup>104</sup> *The Times*, 9 May 1952, p. 2.
- <sup>105</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', spring 1998, women, B1533.
- <sup>106</sup> NA, LCO 2/7065, Exception taken to notifying the General Medical Council of the fact that a doctor had been found guilty of adultery, Letter from Mr Ligertwood to W. D. S. Caird, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1960.
- <sup>107</sup> NA, LCO 2/7065, Exception taken to notifying the General Medical Council of the fact that a doctor had been found guilty of adultery, Letter from Sir George Coldstream to W. D. S. Caird, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1960.
- <sup>108</sup> Klein, 'Irregular marriages'.
- <sup>109</sup> Klein, 'Irregular marriages', p. 215.
- <sup>110</sup> John R. Gillis, *For better, for worse. British marriages 1600 to the present*, Oxford, 1985, p. 303.
- <sup>111</sup> Richards and Elliott, 'Sex and marriage', p. 44.
- <sup>112</sup> M-O, Topic Collection 12, 'Sexual Behaviour', box 11, file A, No. 564.
- <sup>113</sup> M-O, Topic Collection 12, 'Sexual Behaviour', box 11, file A, No. 352.
- <sup>114</sup> Stanley, *Sex surveyed*, p. 122
- <sup>115</sup> Gorer, *Exploring English character*, p. 154.
- <sup>116</sup> Gorer, *Exploring English character*, p. 145.
- <sup>117</sup> RCMD, *Minutes of evidence*, Written evidence from professional people (not used), memorandum submitted by Dr Eustace Chessser, Xxii.
- <sup>118</sup> Gorer, *Exploring English character*, p. 148.
- <sup>119</sup> Gorer, *Exploring English character*, p. 149. The 1957 film, *Woman in a dressing gown* (Dir. J. Lee Thompson) described by Jeffrey Richards as 'a *Brief Encounter* of the council flats', reflects this emphasis upon female self-examination within marital break-up. Upon learning of her husband's affair with a work colleague the wronged wife visits a hairdressers for the first time in years.

- 
- <sup>120</sup> Gorer, *Exploring English character*, p. 149.
- <sup>121</sup> *Woman's Own*, 30 March 1940, p. 2.
- <sup>122</sup> *Woman's Own*, 9 July 1943, p. 22.
- <sup>123</sup> *Woman's Own*, 20 Aug. 1943, p. 18.
- <sup>124</sup> *Woman's Own*, 25 Feb. 1944, p. 18.
- <sup>125</sup> *Woman's Own*, 27 Oct. 1944, p. 22.
- <sup>126</sup> *Woman's Own*, 21 July 1944, p. 18.
- <sup>127</sup> *Woman's Own*, 4 Aug. 1955 p. 53.
- <sup>128</sup> *Woman's Own*, 9 March 1950, p. 45.
- <sup>129</sup> *Woman's Own*, 18 Aug. 1955, p. 53.
- <sup>130</sup> *Woman's Own*, 16 Jan. 1960, p. 65.
- <sup>131</sup> *Woman's Own*, 5 March 1960, p. 77.
- <sup>132</sup> *Woman's Own*, 31 July 1965, p. 57.
- <sup>133</sup> Gorer, *Sex and marriage*, p. 85.
- <sup>134</sup> Gorer, *Sex and marriage*, p. 86.
- <sup>135</sup> Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960*, Manchester, 2000, pp. 152-156.
- <sup>136</sup> Gorer, *Sex and marriage*, p. 159.
- <sup>137</sup> Gorer, *Sex and marriage*, p. 161.
- <sup>138</sup> M-O directive 'Having an affair', women B2645, a retired teacher born in 1914.
- <sup>139</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', men, C110.
- <sup>140</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', women, G1041.
- <sup>141</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', women, N1592.
- <sup>142</sup> Smart, 'Good wives and moral lives', pp. 98-101.
- <sup>143</sup> Vanessa May, 'Divorce in Finnish women's life stories: Defining 'moral' behaviour', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 28, 2005, pp. 473-483.
- <sup>144</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', women, M2290.
- <sup>145</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', women, W853.
- <sup>146</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', men, C110.
- <sup>147</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', men, C110.
- <sup>148</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', women, W853.



---

<sup>149</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', women, B2645.

<sup>150</sup> M-O directive, 'Having an affair', men, R2065.